

USING THE PAST TO INFORM THE FUTURE; VIETNAM AND AFGHANISTAN

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

USING THE PAST TO INFORM THE FUTURE; VIETNAM AND AFGHANISTAN

by

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ABSTRACT

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Lessons learned from the United States' experience in Vietnam should inform our actions in Afghanistan. Using Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic instruments of power as a framework we can see many similarities that should be considered as we move forward in our decision making process in Afghanistan. Diplomatically we must continue to build coalition support. Information must be shared with all partners and audiences in a way to enhance our strategic goals not to detract and cause suspicion. Militarily we cannot afford over the long term to wage a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. Based on the military's constrained resources training and counterterrorism missions are more appropriate than counterinsurgency. Economically the United States must wage war within our economic means. Over expenditure by the military will have negative impacts on our domestic economy that will ultimately lead to a lack of public support for increased defense appropriations. These lessons have been learned in the past, deserve consideration as we formulate policy today, and are vital for informing foreign policy into the future.

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“Thucydides, ...argued that his history of the Peloponnesian Wars could arm future decision-makers to do better when comparable choices came around again on time’s enduring track (he saw it as a circle). He said he wrote for those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will at some time or other and in much the same ways be repeated in the future.”¹ The past cannot predict the future. No two circumstances are exactly alike in every manner. But, when circumstances are similar it is important to consider the outcomes of events that have happened in the past to inform us as we move forward into the unknown future. Richard Neustadt and Ernest R. May make a compelling argument in their book, *Thinking in Time*, that “what succeeded in the past might succeed in the future. What failed then might fail now.”²

In 1965 McGeorge Bundy, the White House Security Assistant to President Johnson, signed and forwarded to the President a document entitled “France in Vietnam, 1954, and the US in Vietnam, 1965 – A Useful Analogy?”³ The document was widely dismissed within the administration. President Johnson remarked, “...some of the lines in Bundy’s French analogy memorandum read like prophecies.”⁴ The lesson to be learned in this example is that, although not completely accurate in every detail, studying the past can inform actions in the future and helps us to develop “vicarious experience”.⁵

There exist an infinite number of examples throughout history that reinforce the importance of studying the past. In the proper context, lessons can be learned from the past. If we are wise we can apply these lessons learned to future decisions to optimize

the results of our decisions. In order to make sound decisions about our future policy in Afghanistan it would be wise to study the decisions and outcomes of those decisions made by our nation's leaders during the Vietnam War.

Our current involvement in Afghanistan has already lasted over nine years with no clear end in sight. We are currently committed to a military presence in Afghanistan until 2014 and possibly beyond with economic and diplomatic ties continuing well beyond that.⁶ The United States has experienced similar conflicts in our recent past. In order to make prudent decisions for our future involvement in Afghanistan we should reflect upon some of the lessons learned from these experiences to inform our policies with respect to the Pakistan – Afghanistan region. Using the Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic (DIME) model we will explore some lessons learned from the conflict in Vietnam and apply those lessons to the current conflict in Afghanistan to frame a comprehensive strategy that is informed by the experiences of our past involvement in the Vietnam War.

Historical Context and Background

In the years immediately after World War II the United States was predominantly focused on rebuilding their allied nations through implementation of the Marshall Plan. Because of this focus the US government relied heavily on France to counter any spread of Communism throughout Indochina⁷. In the spring of 1947, the United States formally committed itself to contain a perceived spread of communism from the Soviet Union into Greece and Turkey.⁸ In the years after 1947 the United States became heavily involved in fighting a perceived spread of Communism in Eastern Europe and shoring up the western states of Europe. As United States' Presidential administrations passed through the White House in the 1950s and 1960s, diplomatic policies with

regard to Europe remained relatively consistent. However, consistency in our policies toward Vietnam did not always mirror our consistency in Europe. This was still a period in our history when the colonial powers that had existed before World War II were trying to continue to assert control over what they believed to still be their colonies operating under a broad sphere of influence. At the same time, we saw the people of these so called colonized nations attempting to become self governing and assert control over their own nations. During that period in time it seems clear to us today that violence would ensue if one side or the other would not change their views on colonization. In 1945, the Viet Mihn led by Ho Chi Mihn overthrew Emperor Bao Dai and seized power throughout Vietnam with Ho Chi Mihn being named President.⁹ In the same year China sent 200,000 personnel to Hanoi. To counter this move Ho Chi Mihn signed an agreement with France who recognized Indochina as an autonomous state.¹⁰ By 1950 the Soviet Union became the first country to recognize the sovereignty of Vietnam. Vietnam was now allied with both China and the Soviet Union and committed to rejecting French influence.¹¹ After years of conflict between the Viet Mihn and the French, in 1954, a final bloody battle between the French and the Viet Mihn ensued at Diem Bien Phu. The French were ultimately forced to surrender marking the beginning of the end for French involvement in Indochina.¹²

Similarly, Afghanistan has had to deal with external influences in its recent past. From 1979 to 1989 the Soviet Union waged a ten year war in Afghanistan resulting in 14,300 deaths.¹³ Upon the withdrawal of Soviet Forces the fundamentalist Muslim Taliban filled the void in Afghanistan. Extremism in Afghanistan grew through the 1990s finally culminating in the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September

2001. Immediately following these attacks the United States expelled the majority of the Taliban influence in Afghanistan. In the intervening years the United States has waged a war of counterinsurgency against a resurgent Taliban influence. Comparing Vietnam with Afghanistan does neither conflict justice. But when we try to compare each situation against the other in limited areas we can learn some lessons by comparing and contrasting how the instruments of power played a significant role in shaping and defining the environments of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Vietnam.

Diplomacy

Diplomatically the US did not formally back Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s. But a quick examination of the Soviet attempts to control Afghanistan show some similarities in the histories of Vietnam and Afghanistan. Vietnam in the 1950s and Afghanistan in the 1980s both were engaged in struggles to free themselves from outside states attempting to control their nations. When the people of these nations were faced with a common, easily identifiable enemy, they quickly joined together putting aside any internal issues so that they could collectively focus their efforts against their common enemies. The Soviet defeat in Afghanistan is much like the defeat of the French and US armies in Vietnam. At least from this perspective we can see how local populations can become formidable foes and master states craftsmen through years of experience gained during years of armed conflict. Because these conflicts were long in duration and the indigenous populations pulled together for a common purpose the diplomatic efforts for resolution became difficult to attain. Diplomatic solutions for armed conflict frequently are nothing more than a suspension of conflict. The root causes of the conflict remain and can be rekindled when the situation presents itself again.

Puppet Regimes. At the conclusion of the first Indochina war the United States made every attempt to ensure that a US friendly government was installed and held power in the South to counter the communist government in the North. During these years the US attempted to counter the spread of communism into the South. George C. Herron in his book, *America's Longest War*, makes a compelling argument that "As elections were to be held, the US used various devices to get around Geneva provisions for elections...they resorted to legalism, insisting that the Geneva articles calling for elections had no juridical value but merely expressed a pious wish that committed no one."¹⁴ So after years of diplomatic wrangling and the absence of the French influence, in order to ensure that Vietnam did not fall into the hands of Communism, the US had to shift its tactics and become militarily involved to carry out diplomacy through armed conflict.

It wasn't until 1965 that the United States wholeheartedly entered the Vietnam War. Our earlier involvement seemed to pit us in a fight against the will of the Vietnamese people and to support minority Vietnamese interests which were tied to American interests.¹⁵ In the diplomatic processes that followed, South Vietnam was building their nation and forming a representative government. Success in this endeavor was essential to the long term success of the nation. In order for the US to succeed in stopping a perceived spread of Chinese or Soviet communism we found ourselves in a situation where we had to back the enemy of our enemy or the anti-communist, Christian minority elite within Vietnam who lacked the backing of the people they were supposed to govern.

Coalitions. The manner in which the United States handled its diplomatic efforts was shaped by the context of lessons learned from its recent history. The United States had benefited greatly by having alliances during World War II. These alliances held strong throughout the duration of that war principally because the enemy they were fighting had so clearly violated international norms that their egregious acts could not be ignored. So, informed by that success, the United States worked through the newly formed United Nations to form an alliance to address the Korean conflict. Within that alliance at the peak of the war the United States contributed 302,000 troops; South Korea contributed 591,000 troops with 15 other countries contributing less than 40,000 troops combined.¹⁶ Because this was a United Nations sanctioned conflict under Unified command, decision making at all levels became infinitely more complex. Learning from this experience the United States decided that it was best to work diplomatically through international organizations but not to become limited in action based on the desires of outside organizations and alliances. However, the United States did actively seek to gain international support diplomatically and by extension militarily. By 1969 the United States was contributing 550,000 troops, the South Vietnamese was contributing 855,000 troops and 69,000 troops were being contributed by the Republic of Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand¹⁷. This number was not what the United States had hoped for, but does show a clear attempt to make this at least a regional conflict with backing from many of the powers of the region.

Duration. Transfer of power after Presidential administrations present opportunities and challenges during diplomatic negotiations. When President Obama

took office in 2009 part of his mandate from the people was to withdraw troops from Iraq and setting of a concrete timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan. President Obama's belief that a quick victory and withdrawal from a theater of operation was possible resembles the thoughts of President Nixon after his election in 1968.¹⁸ George C. Herring in the book, *America's Longest War*, makes the argument that the newly elected Nixon was overly optimistic with respect to American military power stating that, "With that sublime self-confident common among leaders new to power, Nixon and Kissinger were certain they could end the war within six months to a year."¹⁹

Lessons Learned. The US cannot install puppet regimes and expect them to be accepted as legitimate forms of government. In Vietnam we backed a leadership that was not representative of the people of Vietnam. In Afghanistan we are currently backing the government led by President Hamid Karzai who was recently re-elected to serve another term as president. The International Council on Security and Development in an article entitled *Afghan's Presidential Election: Power to the People or to the Powerful*, in April of 2009 argued that there existed a huge split in the polls concerning the reelection chances of President Karzai. There exist two schools of thought internally to Afghanistan; one fully supports Karzai believing that many of his actions that have not completely been in alignment with US desires show that he is not a puppet of the US; and another school of thought from the article is that his sometimes inability to work with the US is cause for great concern.²⁰ In order to ensure legitimacy within any future Afghan government the US, NATO and the UN must ensure that any election is seen internationally and more importantly to the people of Afghanistan as a fairly conducted election that reflects the desires of the majority of the population. If the

government appears to be installed and backed by the US without consent of the Afghani people the government will ultimately fail.

Coalitions are necessary to ensure international acceptance of our political ways, means and ends but can cause us to resort to decision by consensus. The US involvement in Vietnam was predominantly a South Vietnam and US partnership waged against the communist North Vietnamese. Our legitimacy for acting in that region was significantly reduced because of our inability to garner widespread support throughout the world or even the region. Today in Afghanistan we are joined in efforts by most of the nations of NATO. The United Nations Security Council also supports many activities taking place in Afghanistan to establish a functioning government leading to creation of an important player in regional and global security.²¹

Short term solutions with aggressive timelines do not typically prove to be useful. President Nixon attempted to extricate the US from Vietnam within a year of taking office in 1969. His attempts at an honorable exit strategy were not realized until 1975 and even then it can be argued that it was not honorable. President Obama, upon taking office, established aggressive timelines for US withdrawal from Afghanistan. In the intervening time since those decisions, the President appears to be taking the advice of his senior military advisors and has begun shifting his withdrawal timeline away from a specific date towards a conditions based transition policy with the Afghan government and security forces.

Information

General Retired Colin L. Powell is famously quoted for stating that during times of war leaders are simultaneously communicating to five distinct audiences; the reporter, the American people, the heads of every state, the enemy and the Soldier.²²

Using these five audiences as a framework we will quickly examine successes and challenges during the Vietnam and Afghanistan conflicts.

Reporters. Reporters are a key and vital audience as they have the power to interpret your message and relay their interpretation of your message to a very wide audience. During the conflict in Vietnam, embedded reporters gained unprecedented access and used this access to portray a war gone awry swaying public support against the US policies in the region. Jeffrey C. Bliss in an article in the Hoover Digest entitled *The Press Goes to War*, discussed the role of the media in Vietnam stating that "...journalists were covering the conflict in Vietnam, filing reports that many—especially the military—believed were not only biased against U.S. efforts but also playing a significant role in undermining support for the war against communism in Southeast Asia. Television coverage—which brought the horrors of war into the living rooms of America for the first time—was perceived as being particularly harmful to the war effort. Many in the military were left soured on the experience. Reporters had enjoyed nearly free range when it came to access during the war, and many in the Pentagon believed they had abused the privilege. Officials began operating on the premise that *the only good media were controlled media*."²³ Press played a key role in our involvement in Vietnam. The picture that was portrayed in the media undermined US political interests swaying the public into openly questioning of our efforts in Vietnam.

In Afghanistan we have had a significantly different relationship with the press. At the outset of hostilities in Afghanistan there were a significant number of reporters in the country covering stories. Most of these stories backed the US efforts. Much of that support can be tied directly to the perception that the US had clearly been wronged with

the bombing of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the third attempt on an unknown target that ended in failure at the hands of a few brave Americans. The country, NATO and the UN were all united in our cause. Coverage at the outbreak of the conflict was significant but began to quickly diminish. The ensuing war in Iraq shifted attention of the press away from Afghanistan. In an article entitled *Whatever Happened to Afghanistan*, found in the American Journalism Review, Lori Robinson researched the role of the media in Afghanistan and concluded that, "For U.S. newspapers, it's difficult to do a sweeping content study, but a search of Lexis-Nexis stories with a dateline of "Afghanistan" produces some interesting results. From January through the end of April 2002, a search nets a trove of stories that Lexis-Nexis considers too large to display (at least 1,000). A year later, from January through April 2003, there were 167 stories. (Note: Not all newspapers are available through Lexis-Nexis.) Of those 167, more than half were published in two newspapers: the New York Times (52) and the Washington Post (37). Those two papers continue to keep at least one staffer....."²⁴

American People. The American people are one of the most important audiences to consider for any government official when discussing war. The American people are the ones who bear the brunt of the financial and emotional burdens of war. American people are the mothers, fathers, husbands, wives and children who give their loved service members to the government to use as instruments of power against armed adversaries. Without the support of the American people, war cannot continue for an extended period of time. According to a 1 December 2009 Gallup Poll, American's approval rating for the manner in which President Obama has handled the situation in

Afghanistan fell from 56% in July of 2009 to a low of 35% in December of 2009.²⁵

Similarly, Gallup polls during the Vietnam War show approval ratings for President Johnson as high as 56% approval in December of 1965 but then dipping to an all time low of 27% approval in August of 1967. A Wise Men report for President Johnson in November of 1967 reported that, endless inconclusive fighting was the most serious single cause of domestic disquiet.²⁶ McGeorge Bundy taking the guidance of the Wise Men one step further advised the President to “find a strategy that would be tolerable in cost to the American people for the five to ten years that might be required to stabilize the situation in Vietnam.”²⁷

After Tet, President Johnson’s advisers agreed that the key to achieving American objectives was South Vietnam’s ability to stand on its own, and more should be done to promote self sufficiency.²⁸ When President Nixon took over from Johnson he considered pursuing, a “go-for-broke”²⁹ strategy, an all out attempt to “end the war one way or the other – either by negotiated agreement or by force.”³⁰ After careful consideration, Nixon decided to fall back on the Vietnamization policy he had inherited from President Johnson.³¹

After shifting to greater South Vietnamese responsibility for the conflict, communicating to the American population was not handled adroitly in Vietnam, or the later years of the conflict in Afghanistan when a policy of “transition” was instituted. A Rand Study conducted in 1985 concluded that, “The major lesson many former officials drew from the Vietnam War experience was that in future US intervention in the Third World must be decisive and brief.”³² The same study goes on to discuss the dilemma with American support for limited wars in the Third World, “The “rules” of limited war,

intended to avoid nuclear confrontation, may not permit the use of conventional force on a scale that will guarantee rapid results. ... This is precisely one of the most frustrating dilemmas of limited military intervention in the Third World, because costs and length of involvement are impossible to predict with any degree of accuracy at the point when military action is being contemplated.”³³ In both cases of Vietnam and Afghanistan, information conveyed to the American people was not sufficient to maintain popular support for the handling of the wars for extended periods of time.

Heads of State. Information conveyed to heads of every state plays a significant role in the conduct of diplomatic efforts. During the Vietnam conflict there was widespread concern about communism's spread through Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The US argued to world leaders that the spread of Communism was a threat to Democracy. The world became very polarized with most nations aligning with one of the two super powers, the US or USSR. The US had relied heavily on the French to stem the flow of Communism into Vietnam. When the French efforts failed the US felt, that as a super power, they had a moral obligation to intervene into the internal politics in Vietnam to stabilize the country and thus stabilize all of Indochina stemming the spread of communism around the world. The US attempted to form a coalition for their actions in Vietnam but could only muster support from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Philippines, Korea, the Republic of South Vietnam and the Montagnards.³⁴ The US was not even able to garner support through the United Nations Security Council. In stark contrast to the limited support from other countries during the Vietnam war, the US was able to garner limited support from NATO and the UN for actions in Afghanistan. There are still 42 nations contributing troops to the

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan.³⁵ Much of this continued support can be attributed to the handling of information by US government officials to ensure that the heads of countries continue to believe that the mission in Afghanistan is just and worth pursuing even at great cost of life and treasure.

The Enemy. As in every conflict the enemy plays a key role. Information that is being communicated is unquestionably being monitored by our adversaries. They use this information to devise strategies for future operations, to sway local public opinion and to attempt to demonize the US and our efforts abroad. The press, as an agent to distribute information, has done an exceptional job providing sensitive information when one considers the extent to which the Department of Defense values operational security. The most damaging release of information with regard to our current conflict in Afghanistan occurred when Wikileaks released over 75,000 classified documents in July, 2010.³⁶ This criminal release of classified information will undoubtedly cause serious damage to not only our national security but also to the safety of our sources that have been revealed and our coalition partners. President Obama has also made what might be considered a questionable statement when he openly set timelines for the US to exit Afghanistan. On 1 December 2009 President Obama delivered a speech in which he outlined his plan for Afghanistan. Two key point that he made were that the US would begin to depart Afghanistan in 18 months or the summer of 2011 and that he was committing an additional 30,000 troops to the military effort.³⁷ Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates voiced concern over the establishment of a publicly stated withdrawal date.³⁸ In recent weeks, the Obama administration has indicated that the 2011 date was a marker on the wall to begin transition with continued presence in

Afghanistan until 2014 in accordance with our NATO allies' decision at the Lisbon talks in November 2010.³⁹ Our experiences in Vietnam were significantly different than today. Information about operational and strategic wartime decisions were much more closely held. The US did not provide nearly the amount of information to the enemy back then as we do today. Some would argue that this openness and transparency provides advantages to our adversaries. The counter argument holds that this transparency is one of the main factors in conveying our intent justifying continuance of the conflict. During Vietnam the enemy had to work harder at developing sources to gain information. Today most information is readily available for the world to see.

Much of debate about the war in Vietnam was played out through the media in stark contrast to the experiences we now have surrounding Afghanistan. During the Vietnam debate, Senator J. William Fulbright, a conservative Arkansas Senator conducted a series of nationally televised hearings, bringing before the viewing public such critics of administrative policies as General James Gavin and diplomat George F. Kennan, the father of the containment policy⁴⁰. According to George C. Herron, a respected author on Vietnam, "There were hundreds of acts of individual defiance."⁴¹ The enemy knew of this dissent and fed on it to remain committed to their efforts in Vietnam. They could see the public debate playing out in front of them and used that as a rallying point to maintain North Vietnamese public support.

The Soldier. The Soldier implements policies given to him from the government. In order to be effective the Soldier must respect and believe in the civilian leadership that makes the policies that he must implement. During the Vietnam Army, 25% of

those who served were draftees.⁴² These draftees typically entered the service as junior enlisted Soldiers with a two year commitment. The draftee Army lead to extremely high turnover rates in the junior ranks which would put strains on the noncommissioned and commissioned officer corps. Information provided to these draftees would most likely not change their opinions about the conduct of the war. At the conclusion of the Vietnam War the draft was discontinued and the military moved to an all volunteer force. The transition to an all volunteer force meant that the US now had a fighting force consisting of those who voluntarily chose to fight for the nation. During Vietnam up to 25% of the fighting force did not voluntarily chose to enter the armed forces but were forced through law. Willingness to serve makes the job of communicating to the Soldier much easier for our leadership. Today's Army is meeting the challenges of two protracted conflicts with an all volunteer force. The Armed Services have continued to maintain our end strength while engaged in two wars because those who qualify for service believe in the causes of the Armed Forces for which they serve. Information to the Soldier as an audience helps recruit others and assists the Services in keeping their best in brightest even through times of repeated deployments and exposure to traumatic experiences abroad.

Lessons Learned: One of the most important things we have learned through our experiences in Vietnam and other conflicts is the key role that the press plays in portraying our conflicts as either just or unjust. Reporters during the Vietnam War did not empathize with their military or executive branch counterparts. The lack of empathy and trust clouded and influenced their reporting. Release of information not favorable for the government became easier because there was a small, yet vocal, portion of the

US population who did not support the War efforts in Vietnam. This dissent created the market that spiraled into a continual effort by some parts of the press to show negative aspects of the conflict. The relief of General (Retired) Stanley McChrystal for his comments and those of his staff to reporters also highlights a key lesson that must be learned. Once you become a senior leader your comments are never off the record.

The American public has a very short attention span. Protracted conflicts are not popular but in order to maintain popular support information must flow openly to the public so that they can remain connected to the cause. We have learned from Vietnam the importance of informing the American public about the details of the conflict but have failed at maintaining the interest of the public in support of the root causes of the conflict. Coverage has subsided considerably for the Afghanistan war unless there is a sensational story or some type of widespread disagreement. At best we must continue to tell the stories of our Soldiers so that the public back home sees the good that happens every day. Our actions in foreign lands make a difference and in order to continue to garner public support we must get the word out.

Informing the heads of states ties directly back to our diplomatic efforts. During the conflict in Vietnam we did not adequately succeed in forming coalitions to help legitimize our cause. During the Afghanistan War we have continued to work closely with our NATO and non NATO partners to maintain international credibility and support for our actions.

The ease with which information can flow around the world makes us vulnerable to our enemies. With the proliferation of the internet, television and cell phone technology it is difficult to keep anything secret for long. This openness has created

vulnerabilities with respect to operational security. The recent Wikileaks release of thousands of classified documents has compounded the difficulty of our diplomatic efforts abroad as well as internally. Setting timetables for withdrawal only serves to embolden our adversaries.

Informing our Soldiers and military as a whole is as important as ever but has become increasingly easy with the advent of the all volunteer force. Soldiers need to believe in what they are fighting for. Keeping them informed keeps them motivated and allows them to act without fear of retribution as they believe they are engaged in just war. Vietnam taught us that a military consisting of approximately 25% draftees comes with problems that are difficult to overcome solely through the use of information.

Military

Background. Since late in 2001 the United States has been engaged in one of the longest wars in its history in Afghanistan. During the last ten years the objectives of the United States in that country have shifted. There are many reasons why our objectives have morphed. The war in Iraq played a huge role in shaping our efforts in Afghanistan. With limited resources in the Departments of State and Defense, national priorities were given to Iraq. This was a decision made by the Commander in Chief and appeared to have the buy in from most of the decision and policy makers in the US. By 2008 the total troop strength in Iraq would be 161,000. By comparison, the total troop strength in Afghanistan was 38,000.⁴³ As conditions began to improve in Iraq, the Commander in Chief made a decision to agree to the current Strategic Framework Agreement that set troop strength limits decreasing the total number of troops in Iraq to 50,000 in 2010. The current Strategic Framework Agreement between the US and Iraq calls for the removal of all troops by December 31, 2011.⁴⁴ After President Obama was

elected as our new Commander in Chief he and his staff decided to begin a troop increase in Afghanistan raising the number of troops deployed there to 98,000.⁴⁵ Taking these troop deployment dynamics into consideration, the President and the Secretary of Defense now have an opportunity to review our current strategy in Afghanistan. Manpower resources are more readily available than at any other time in recent history. So what should we do with these resources?

Objective. On 24 February 2010, the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan updated its Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates included messages from their offices. Secretary Clinton's message stated, "As President Obama made clear at West Point on December 1, our civilian engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan will endure long after our combat troops come home. While our military mission in Afghanistan is not open-ended, we are committed to building lasting partnerships with Afghanistan and Pakistan."⁴⁶ Secretary Gates' message stated, "As the President re-emphasized in December 2009, the goal of the United States in Afghanistan and Pakistan is to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda and its extremist allies, and to prevent its return to both countries."⁴⁷ It seems pretty clear from these two statements that the objective is to commit sufficient troops for a sufficient amount of time to create a safe enough environment for diplomatic, economic and informational efforts to take root in Afghanistan.

A similar set of circumstances existed in 1967 for President Johnson. Troop levels were at an all time high. He and his National Security team opted to pursue a policy of Americanization. They began implementation of the policy in 1967, when the

United States had almost half a million troops in Vietnam.⁴⁸ The strategy of Americanization met with mixed results. After Tet, President Johnson's advisers agreed that the key to achieving American objectives was South Vietnam's ability to stand on its own and more should be done to promote self sufficiency.⁴⁹ President Nixon, upon taking office at first considered massive retaliation. After much debate Nixon opted for the Vietnamization policy he had inherited from President Johnson in lieu of massive retaliation.⁵⁰ The opportunities presented in 1967-68 with respect to troop commitment are now occurring in the War in Afghanistan.

Option 1, Status Quo. The DoD could continue with the current status quo and begin a troop reduction in July of 2011. Current efforts include a blend of counterinsurgency doctrine mixed with an element of counterterrorism supported by a training mission. In order to effectively conduct counterinsurgency operations troop densities should be about twenty to twenty five counterinsurgency troops for every 1,000 residents in an operating area.⁵¹ According to the CIA factbook, the current population of Afghanistan is 29,121,000.⁵² If we assume that every single troop deployed to Afghanistan is conducting counterinsurgency operations the ratio of counterinsurgent to resident would be roughly 300 to 1. One could argue that focused counterinsurgency operations in large population centers could be effective much as it was in Baghdad, Iraq in 2007-08. Even with concentrated attempts in the south it would be difficult to mass enough combat forces to achieve the 25:1 ratio proposed in FM 3-24. Kandahar, Helmand, Qalat, and Tarin Kot provinces have a combined population of about 2.5 million⁵³. Once again assuming that all 98K troops are engaged in counterinsurgency operations we barely have the 25:1 ration. Even with NATO's

contributions of 32,000 troops to the effort, there are still only roughly 132,000 Soldiers, committed to the cause.⁵⁴ It would appear that militarily we are not resourced to conduct a decisive counterinsurgency operation for the people of Afghanistan. To bridge that gap we must have the Afghan National Security apparatus stand up and begin to assume responsibility for protecting the citizens of their nation.

A large part of the current military strategy is to train the Afghan National Army and Police so that they can provide their own security and not rely on outside actors. NATO has contributed significantly to this effort donating over 300,000,000 US Dollars of equipment to the Afghan National Army.⁵⁵ Following the argument above concerning manpower levels, it is clear that our military manpower resourcing efforts are under resourced.

In accordance with the Department of Defense's goal as stated above to disrupt dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda and its extremist allies, it is clear that any course of action with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan would have to include an element of counterterrorism operations. Since 2001, the United States military alongside the Central Intelligence Agency has developed into the best man hunting organization ever to exist. We have devoted heavily to resourcing technology to keep pace with the tactics, techniques and procedures of our adversaries. The Intelligence Community (IC) is the best in the world with respect to technologic capability. Our operators are second to none. Our special operations community has always performed counterterrorism (CT) tasks flawlessly. But, over the last several years our conventional forces have experienced increased access to technology and in their ability to conduct CT operations. The DoD has been able to partner with the IC to acquire capabilities that

only previously had been provided to members of the IC or within the Special Operations community. Since taking office, President Obama has increased the use of Predator drones armed with missiles to destroy CT related targets in Pakistan. The President's use of this tactic has become so comfortable for him that during a White House Correspondents Association Dinner in May of 2010 he spotted the Jonas Brothers (a popular boy band among female tweeners) in the audience and said, "Sasha and Malia are huge fans, but boys, don't get any ideas. Two words for you: predator drones. You will never see it coming."⁵⁶ That is a pretty flip statement from the President of the United States. But his use of that tactic in that forum shows how comfortable he is with authorizing its use presumably against terrorist targets.

Our current use of hellfire missiles in Pakistan to disrupt terrorist activities emanating from the tribal regions of Pakistan is similar in some ways to the massive bombing efforts during Vietnam. The intent for the bombing in Vietnam was to shape diplomatic efforts. Nixon's primary motive was to show resolve to winning the war at all costs. He wanted the world to know that he was willing to take measures Johnson had avoided in an attempt to coerce Hanoi into negotiating on his terms.⁵⁷ Over the next fifteen months, 3630 B-52 raids were flown, dropping more than 100,000 tons of bombs on Cambodia.⁵⁸ President Obama's increased use of hellfire missiles against Taliban strongholds in Pakistan seems to be aimed at similar objectives. First to show that he is willing to do things that the previous administration would not do and secondly to attempt to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table to work toward a peaceful resolution.

Counterterrorism (CT) efforts are the most economical to conduct with regard to personnel. CT efforts are very surgical by nature and require more effort in the targeting process to locate CT targets than in the conduct of Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. But, the vast majority of the intelligence needed in order to conduct CT operations can be done outside of Afghanistan by analysts working at their home agency using state of the art technology.

Option 2, Increase Training Decrease COIN. One possible strategy involves immediately divesting from our COIN efforts and focusing the majority of the troops now committed to COIN to the training mission. Our efforts in CT will remain at about their current level. As previously discussed, in order to conduct a COIN effort we would need to adequately resource the effort with personnel. Boots on the ground is the key component to this strategy. Because we have self imposed a 98k troop ceiling in Afghanistan we have essentially tied our own hands and eliminated COIN as a viable strategy. If we attempt to conduct localized, targeted COIN operations in key population concentrations we will have to reduce our efforts training the Afghan National Security apparatus. Based on current limitations we simply do not have adequate personnel to conduct CT, COIN and a Training mission simultaneously. COIN as a strategy in Afghanistan will have the best shot at success when it is being conducted by the people of Afghanistan much like the successes gained by Vietnamization. Vietnamization was in full swing by early 1970 and most observers agreed that significant gains had been made. The South Vietnamese Army had become one of the largest and best-equipped in the world. By this time most of the units in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam were doing a respectable job of fighting the counterinsurgency and with minimal assistance

could continue on their own.⁵⁹ It is because of this experience that we should conduct an economy of force COIN effort in only those places that is vital for national interests. We will assume risk in the short term in our COIN efforts in order to prepare the Afghans to conduct COIN for the long term. When properly resourced, trained and led it is arguable that an Afghani Military Force could become as proficient as the ARVN in the early 1970s.

Option 3, Increase CT, Decrease COIN. In order to meet the goals of the President as outlined by the Secretaries of Defense and State, we could also pursue a strategy where we significantly increase our CT efforts while divesting from our COIN efforts and maintaining the status quo in our training efforts. Defeating al-Qaeda is a clearly stated goal for the President. In order to meet that goal we should continue to kill al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and force them in to a relatively safe haven in Pakistan. Then using the Pakistani military as a backstop we should continue the press through increased Predator strikes against our enemies. Training will play an increasingly important role as we push Afghan security forces out to the field. Partnering with Afghani security forces will be vital to ensuring the quality of the product (Afghan security force) we are producing. Partnering will also help instill confidence as they begin to stand up an infrastructure that probably has never existed in that country in that form.

Without full coordinated Pakistani support in the tribal areas of Western Pakistan this strategy would most likely not succeed. Deployment of US or NATO forces into Pakistan is not politically feasible at this time because of the political climate in the region. Even if the US did decide to commit troops to Pakistan we should look to the

past for lessons learned concerning invading a neighboring country to deny safe haven for militant forces. At the tactical and operational levels offensive operations into Cambodia could be considered successful. The US command claimed to have killed 2,000 enemy troops.⁶⁰ The US command made the case that the offensive interdicted North Vietnamese supply lines which bought time for the Vietnamization policy to take roots.⁶¹ The strategy although producing short term gains failed in its efforts in the long run. One of the second order effects of the offensive into Cambodia was the reaction of the North to provide substantial support to the Khmer Rouge resulting in large scale humanitarian atrocities.⁶² Although the US could have short term gains in Pakistan we do not have adequate forces to destroy the Al Qaeda, Taliban and other militant forces in the region. Upon our withdrawal those forces would return possibly committing atrocities to reassert their authority over the region. With the current instability in Pakistan it is best to work diplomatically for increased governance and leave the military option out of the equation.

A large part of the threat within Afghanistan emanates from the Taliban. When we invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 they were the existing government. Our military in cooperation with various Afghan Warlords and the CIA eliminated the Taliban as a government entity. This caused a huge vacuum of power in the country. In order for any of the proposals outlined above to be effective we must do one of two things with regard to the Taliban. First, we could expand our CT efforts and attempt to capture/kill any remaining Taliban leadership and the Afghanistan/Pakistan region. Or we could attempt to reconcile the moderate Taliban that provided some type of government in the past. Concessions would need to be made but it might be the only way to ensure any

type of lasting stability. They must buy in to the notion that in order to prosper as a nation they need to have an internationally recognized form of governance. Rule through fear and intimidation will only work for so long before it destroys itself.

Feasibility. Feasibility assesses whether the assigned mission can be accomplished using available resources within the time contemplated by the plan.⁶³ Maintaining the status quo does not seem to be a feasible strategy based on the self imposed troop cap of 98K⁶⁴ which will not provide an adequate amount of counterinsurgents to effectively prosecute a COIN strategy successfully. Additionally, a COIN strategy takes time to successfully prosecute. Artificial timelines will force condensed clear, build, hold and transfer phases of the operation. This condensed timeframe will significantly decrease the efficacy of our efforts. Our second proposed strategy called for increasing our training efforts at the expense of our COIN strategy. This strategy is more feasible than the status quo because it would require less US Soldiers on the ground and parts of the training mission could and should be shared more by our NATO partners and civilian trainers. Most troop contributing nations feel more comfortable committing their troops to a training mission than to a COIN mission because of the reduced risk to their Soldiers. Increasing our CT efforts at the expense of COIN is the most feasible strategy. Our current efforts could continue without a significant increase in troops. Although this is feasible from a US perspective this strategy relies on the commitment of Pakistani force in the western tribal areas to at least block al-Qaeda escape routes. Increasing our CT efforts at the expense of COIN is the most feasible of the strategies discussed.

Acceptability. Acceptability assesses whether the contemplated strategy is proportional and worth the cost in personnel, equipment, materiel, time involved, or position; is consistent with the law of war; and is militarily and politically supportable.⁶⁵ Maintaining the status quo is an acceptable course of action. The President has ensured the public and Congress that his current plan is fiscally constrained and resource informed. His cap on troop strength and establishment of a clear date to begin transition makes the strategy acceptable politically and to the majority of the American people. A recent Gallup Poll from June of 2010 indicates that 58% of Americans approve of President Obama's timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁶⁶ Increasing our training effort at the expense of COIN is an acceptable strategy as long as we are committed to providing adequate training to the Afghan security forces for as long as they need the training and partnering. Decreasing our COIN efforts in order to increase CT efforts are acceptable strategies in line with the President's stated objectives. The American population would find this strategy favorable because it would decrease the number of Soldiers put into harm's way. CT strikes would continue to show results degrading the ability of al-Qaeda and others to operate freely. Increasing our CT efforts at the expense of COIN is the most acceptable strategy discussed.

Suitability. Suitability tests whether the proposed strategy achieves the desired end.⁶⁷ As stated by our Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State earlier in this discussion, the desired end state is the defeat of al-Qaeda and a solid partnership with the government of Afghanistan. All three of the proposed strategies are suitable; they can achieve the desired end state.

Risk. Risk exists regardless which strategy is pursued. Maintaining the status quo has significant risk because of the artificial troop cap and timetable imposed on the military by its civilian leadership. Even with the 25:1 ratio of counterinsurgents to population, COIN takes time to take root and flourish. The artificial timetable imposed by the President only exacerbates the problems inherent to this type of strategy. Increasing training efforts at the expense of COIN will expand the window of risk while the Afghan security forces are being trained. Increasing the number of trainers supplied by the US, NATO and civilians will help mitigate that risk to a manageable level. Increasing our CT efforts at the expense of COIN opens up the same window of vulnerability for the Afghan people until their security forces are trained and ready to protect the population. Increased efforts in the training strategy would help mitigate the risk imposed by decreasing our COIN efforts.

The recommended strategy for Afghanistan would be to step up our CT efforts while divesting ourselves from our COIN strategy. This strategy is feasible, acceptable and suitable. It would keep us focused on the Secretary of Defense's stated goal, the destruction of al-Qaeda. Current training efforts would continue to enable the Afghans to provide their own security and we could reduce the total troop strength in the country therefore reducing the number of Soldiers on the ground and reducing costs to the US. Maintaining the status quo in our Afghanistan military policy, although suitable and acceptable does not appear to be feasible based on the limitations imposed by a timetable and troop ceiling. COIN takes time and people, neither of which we seem committed to providing. Increasing our training efforts at the expense of COIN is a viable course of action. It would allow us to continue without CT efforts while reinforcing

the efforts already underway to train the Afghan security forces. Once the Afghan security forces are trained they could then fight their own COIN campaign against any resurgent element of the Taliban or other non recognized form of government.

Economic

Domestic economic concerns are as much an influence on our strategy in Afghanistan as are foreign economic concerns. Economic sanctions play a significant role as a persuasive instrument of power before the commitment of the military. Once the decision has been made to commit forces to a conflict as an instrument of power, economic actions take on a supporting role. In recent years the Department of Defense has recognized the importance of economic considerations when conducting counterinsurgency operations even publishing a Tactics, Techniques and Procedures Manual in April of 2009 entitled “Commander’s Guide to Money as a Weapons System”.⁶⁸ This Handbook outlines eight key lessons focusing on the use of money as a critical combat enabler in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment.⁶⁹ Clearly this focus demonstrates that the military is formally accepting the importance of economic considerations during COIN. The Department of State has understood and relied on this assertion as its primary means toward their diplomatic end.

Efficient Use of Aid. Aid can be defined as “an international charity.”⁷⁰ Where “aid” can be considered to be charitable in nature, the preponderance of economic expenditures during the conflict in Vietnam were means towards an end. The simplest measure of US aid to Vietnam is the sum of all expenditures.⁷¹ From 1965 until 1975 the US total economic assistance to Vietnam started at \$608 million (4.2 billion in 2010 US Dollars {USD}) in 1965 rising annually to a peak of \$3,880 million (19.8 billion in 2010 USD) in 1973 and rapidly dropping to \$866 million (3.6 billions 2010 USD) in 1975 for a

total economic assistance package of \$21,895 million (91.1 billion 2010 USD) dollars during that ten year period.⁷² In comparison, the United States has spent \$20 billion in Afghanistan in 2001-2002 with a relatively steady increase to \$119 billion requested for FY2011 and a total expenditure during the ten year period of \$336 billion.⁷³

Neither Vietnam nor Afghanistan had adequate governmental or economic infrastructures to efficiently handle the huge influx of USDs. In order to ensure unity of effort with regard to the economic instrument of power the Department of Defense has to partner more efficiently at all levels with the Department of State. One significant difference between economic aid in Vietnam and Afghanistan is that in Vietnam the US had been assisting Vietnam for at least the ten years prior to the outbreak of military action in 1965.⁷⁴ Considering this rolling start and the relative abundance of US dollars to support the efforts in Vietnam, the Department of Defense was able to essentially take over 90% of the entire USAID foreign aid budget spending it on “military forces, the civil guard, and the intelligence services, and only a minute fraction went to industrial or agriculture development.”⁷⁵

Economic Impact at Home. In both the Vietnam and Afghanistan Wars the United States has spent itself into extreme debt effecting the economy at home and way of life for America. One indicator of the health of an economy is the unemployment rate. In the mid the 1960s the average unemployment rate in the United States hovered around 4%. As US expenditures increased from the mid 1960s through 1975 the unemployment rate rose to 9% in May of 1975.⁷⁶ Similarly the unemployment rate in the United States in 2001 hovered around 4.5% and has rise to about 10% in 2010. Housing starts in the US in 1975 were at a nine year low, 939,000. Housing starts in

2009 were at their lowest point since at least 1959 when the census bureau began keeping that statistic, 905,000. Housing starts in 1965 were 1,240,000 and in 2001 there were 1,636,000 starts.⁷⁷ Another measure of economic health can be seen in the percentage of our national debt compared to GDP. In 1965 the percentage of national debt to GDP was .2% compared with 4.04 in 1976. In 2001 our debt to GDP was -1.25 and in 2010 it stands at 10.64.⁷⁸

Increasing defense outlays for Vietnam and baseline defense needs helped fuel the inflationary trend through the late 1960s. Defense spending was estimated to have generated at least 7 percent of the gross national product (GNP) during the period of peak involvement in the mid-to-late 1960s; however, the pressures of higher spending with minimal increases in taxes fueled inflation as the consumer price index rose from 111 percent at the beginning of 1966 to 117.5 percent by the fall of 1967....the toll on the economy, coupled with mounting casualties, and general public disenchantment with war all led to increased criticism of military spending...⁷⁹

Although there are many reasons behind the sharp decline in our economies, it is more than coincidental that after years of prolonged conflict in both Vietnam and Afghanistan, the US has paid dearly in both the lives of our military but also in treasure. A wise adversary could easily see that the cost of the way the US wages war is significant and affects the US economy and her people. Even if casualty rates are not high, our adversaries can inflict great harm by prolonging conflict at great cost to the US. The citizens of the US will back a war as long as it doesn't affect them. Once the civilian population comes to the conclusion that our war efforts abroad are too costly and it affects them personally they will vote for a Congress and President that will focus domestically first even at the risk of not winning the wars of the nation. Simply put, we cannot, as a nation, afford to wage long protracted wars if we continue to resource them at the rates we have for the last 50 years. Once the will of the nation is lost, the war is

no longer winnable. The US has at times lost sight of this reality but a recent report published by the Center for a New American Security is calling for a reduction of troops from 140,000 to roughly 70,000 over the next three years and shifting the focus from COIN to CT.⁸⁰ This strategy would be less costly in both lives and national treasure and might be more easily accepted by the citizens of the US.

Interagency Coordination. In order to effectively wield the economic instrument of power the US must remember to coordinate economic efforts between the DoD and DoS working towards a common ends and at a cost that that does not bankrupt the US economy. Experiences in Vietnam have shown us that DoS efforts must complement those of the DoD. The DoD must never usurp the power of DoS but must work together toward achieving goals set forth in a Joint Common Plan. Based on economic realities any war that we engage in must be economically restrained in order for the US to maintain our economic dominance throughout the world or we will lose our relative power in the economic instrument of power. In the aftermath of the Vietnam conflict the United States, although not physically harmed, was economically debilitated. The price tag has been estimated at \$167 billion, a raw statistic that does not begin to measure the full economic damage our country suffered. The war triggered inflation that helped undermine, at least temporarily, American's position in the world economy.⁸¹ Losing this edge through increased debt to other nations only makes us more vulnerable to the desires of other nations.

Lesson Learned. During the Vietnam War the Department of State through USAID and the Department of Defense did not share a common vision and lacked unity of effort. During the period of 1965-1975, the DoD was the supported agency. The

DoD capitalized on this relationship significantly leveraging USAID funding toward DoD ends. In order to be an effective team these two agencies need to share a common vision for the future. That lesson has been learned and the DoD and DoS have been implementing Joint Common Plans to unify efforts in Afghanistan. This is done at every level where there is both DoD and DoS representation. Unity of effort at each echelon is needed in order to maximize resources towards a common end.

Conclusion

The Vietnam War can help us highlight issues that were encountered when using the instruments of power as ways and means to achieve US ends in Indochina to stem the flow of communism. Although there are many differences in the environments, our efforts in Afghanistan do show some parallels that make this analysis worth consideration. Diplomatically, the US must continue to build coalition support to ensure legitimacy within the international community. We have also learned that in war torn regions where we are attempting to establish governance, we must diplomatically back governments that have been fairly elected to lead their people. Puppet regimes do not work and can add fuel to public discontent. Clear, honest, and reflective information sharing among the government and GEN (R) Powell's five audiences is critical to maintaining widespread support and is an excellent model to use to ensure the information being shared is informed by thoughtful consideration of the different stakeholders. Leaked information can cause grave danger to the US and our allies and can cause harm to our diplomatic efforts. We must continue to ensure information security is paramount in order to safeguard our sources and methods. Based on current troop end strength limits and self imposed timelines for withdrawal, the US should adopt a strategy of continued counterterrorism efforts, divest from a majority of

our unilateral counterinsurgency efforts and focus on building the Afghani security apparatus. COIN can only effectively be conducted by Afghanis. Economically we need to become more efficient at waging modern warfare. We must be able to conduct cheaper wars in much shorter periods of time than Vietnam and Afghanistan. The US public and Congress will no longer support bankrupting the US government in order to wage war abroad even if it is aligned with our national interests. Long wars that do not directly threaten the US will not be tolerated by the US citizens that ultimately pay the bill for the war. The Vietnam War has taught the US these lessons and more. As a responsible government the US must use these lessons to inform our strategy for the way ahead in Afghanistan.

History provides valuable lessons. Prudent policy makers and leaders at all levels should learn from the past and apply those lessons in the proper context. No two situations are alike, but many are similar enough to inform us as we move into an unknown future. Arrogance and hubris should not get in the way of learning lessons from the past. Wasting the sometimes painful lessons of our predecessors and our Nation is a travesty that we must not let occur. Using the study of history as a way of increasing our vicarious experience can only help us as leaders as we move forward into a future full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

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⁷⁶ http://www.data360.org/dsg.aspx?Data_Set_Group_Id=248&count=all

⁷⁷ <http://www.census.gov/const/bpann.pdf>

⁷⁸ US Federal Deficit as a Percentage of GDP, found at http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/downchart_gs.php?year=1960_2010&view=1&expand=&units=p&fy=fy11&chart=G0-fed&bar=0&stack=1&size=m&title=US%20Federal%20Deficit%20As%20Percent%20Of%20GDP&state=US&color=c&local=s

⁷⁹ Richard M. Miller, Jr., Funding Extended Conflicts: Korea, Vietnam, and the War on Terror, Praeger Security International, Terrorism, homeland Security, Strategy found at <HTTP://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d+/books/gpg/C9896-2010.xml>.

⁸⁰ Report Calls for Shift to Smaller, Cheaper Afghan Mission, National Journal.com, December 7, 2010 found at <http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20101208794163.html>.

⁸¹ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War, The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, fourth edition, McGraw Hill, University of Kentucky, 2002, page 346.